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The Problem of Declining Enrollment in the Elementary Schools of Lyman County

W. F. Kumlien

Howard M. Sauer

C. Scandrette

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April, 1942

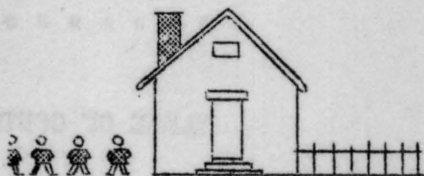
THE PROBLEM OF DECLINING ENROLLMENT

in
The Elementary Schools
of
Lyman County

W. F. Kumlien
Howard M. Sauer
C. Scandrette



In 1909, 2,071 pupils were enrolled in the rural schools of Lyman county



but in 1940 the total enrollment was only 476

Each figure represents 100 pupils

Department of Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station of the South Dakota State College of
Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, South Dakota

EXPLANTORY NOTE

During recent years, enrollments in most South Dakota elementary schools have declined at a very rapid rate. The prevailing type of rural school district organization in most counties has proved rather ineffective in coping with dwindling enrollments and with the consequent high cost per pupil.

It is the purpose of this pamphlet to assist educators, school board members and other Lyman County leaders, by analyzing the nature of the problem and by presenting suggestions for its solution; as they have grown out of the experiences of other South Dakota communities.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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This study was made possible through the cooperation of the State and Federal Work Projects Administration and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The project is officially designated as W. P. A. Project No. 265-1-74-57. The authors gratefully acknowledge the cooperation of Mr. Sanford Brakke, the Lyman County Superintendent of Schools, from whose office most of the data used in this study were secured; and of high school superintendents who supplied lists of their tuition students.

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The Problem of Declining Enrollments in the Elementary Schools of Lyman County

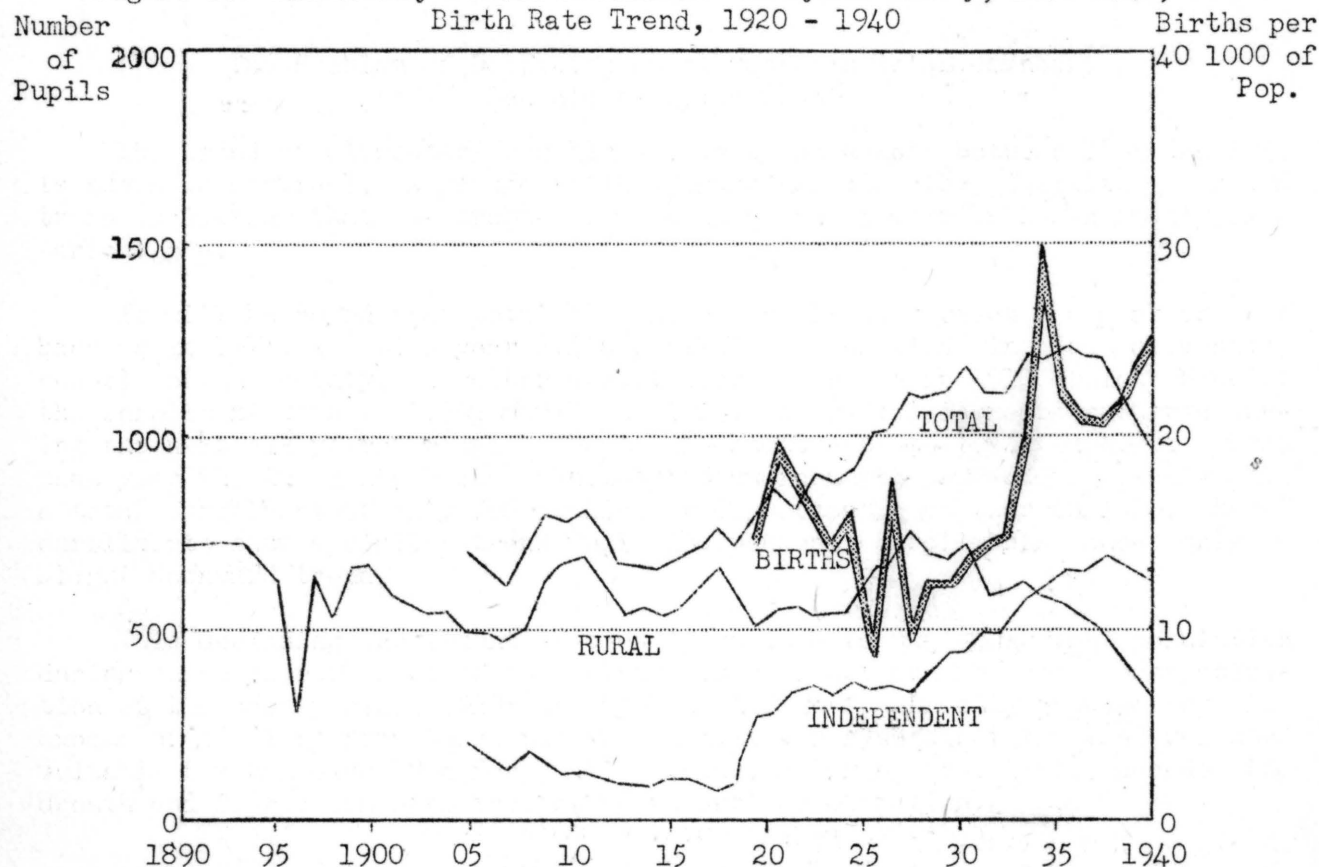
The trend of elementary enrollments in Lyman county between 1894 and 1940 is shown in Figure 1. A glance at the figure reveals the definite downward trend indicating that the problem of declining enrollment in Lyman county is a serious one.

It will be noted that total elementary enrollments reached a peak as far back as in 1911, in which year 2,456 pupils were enrolled in the elementary schools of the county. A rather abrupt decrease began in 1912 which brought the enrollment down to 1,302 pupils by 1919. A gradual increase occurred during the next six years bringing the total enrollments to 1,744 in 1925. From that year the trend has been definitely downward until in 1940 the county had a total enrollment of only 798 pupils, or 67 percent less than in 1910. Rural enrollments show a similar trend while independent enrollments show only a slight downward trend.

This declining enrollment is closely related to the changing population during these years. Part of this change is no doubt due to some reorganization of the county since 1920; however it is more directly caused by the exodus of settlers from these regions when it was found that the land was more suitable for ranching than for small farming. During the last decade the drouth and depression have brought about further migration.

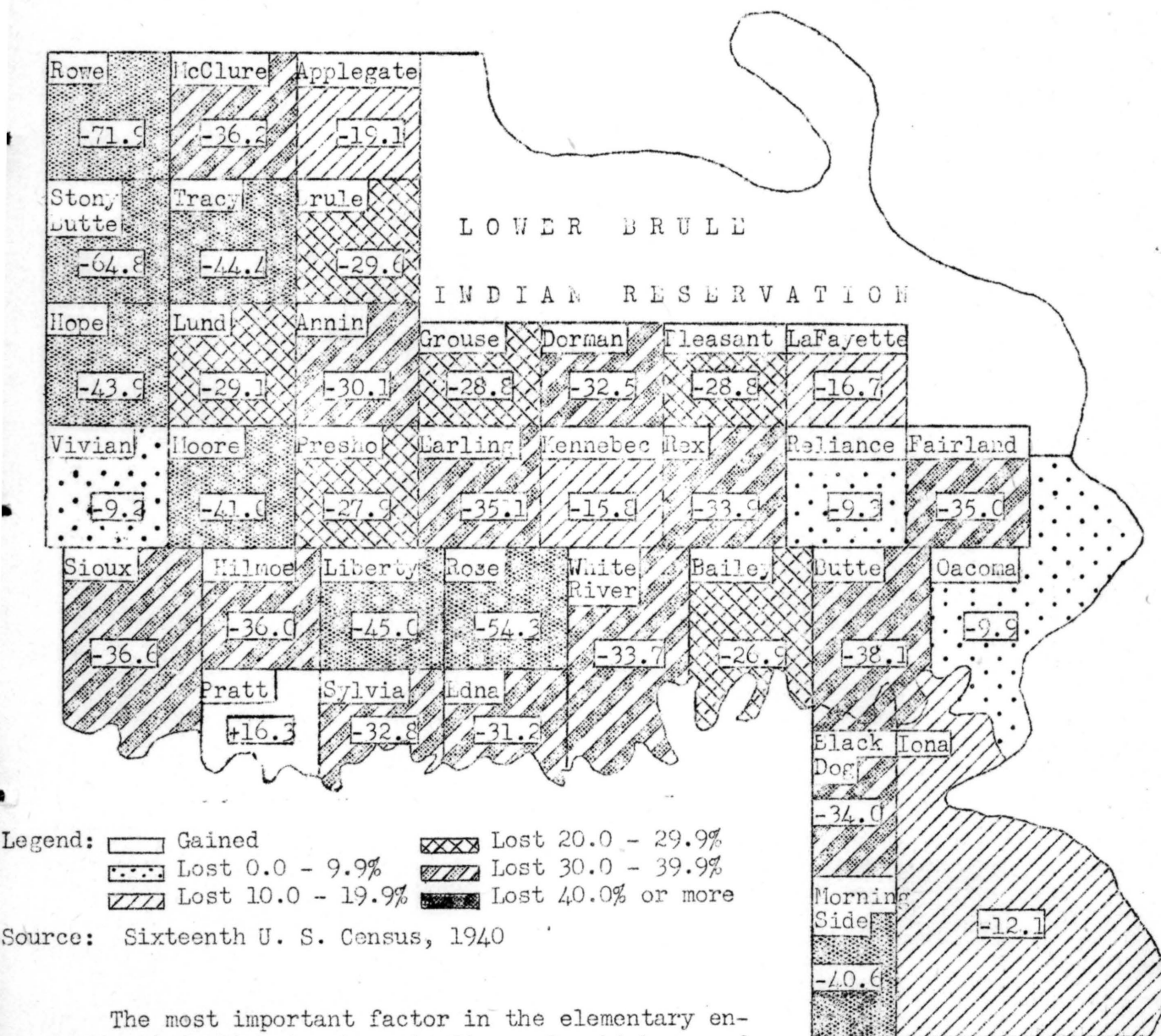
Figure 1. Elementary School Enrollment in Lyman County, 1890-1940, and

Birth Rate Trend, 1920 - 1940



Source: Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and Reports of the State Board of Health

Figure 2. Population Gains and Losses in Lyman County, 1920 - 1940



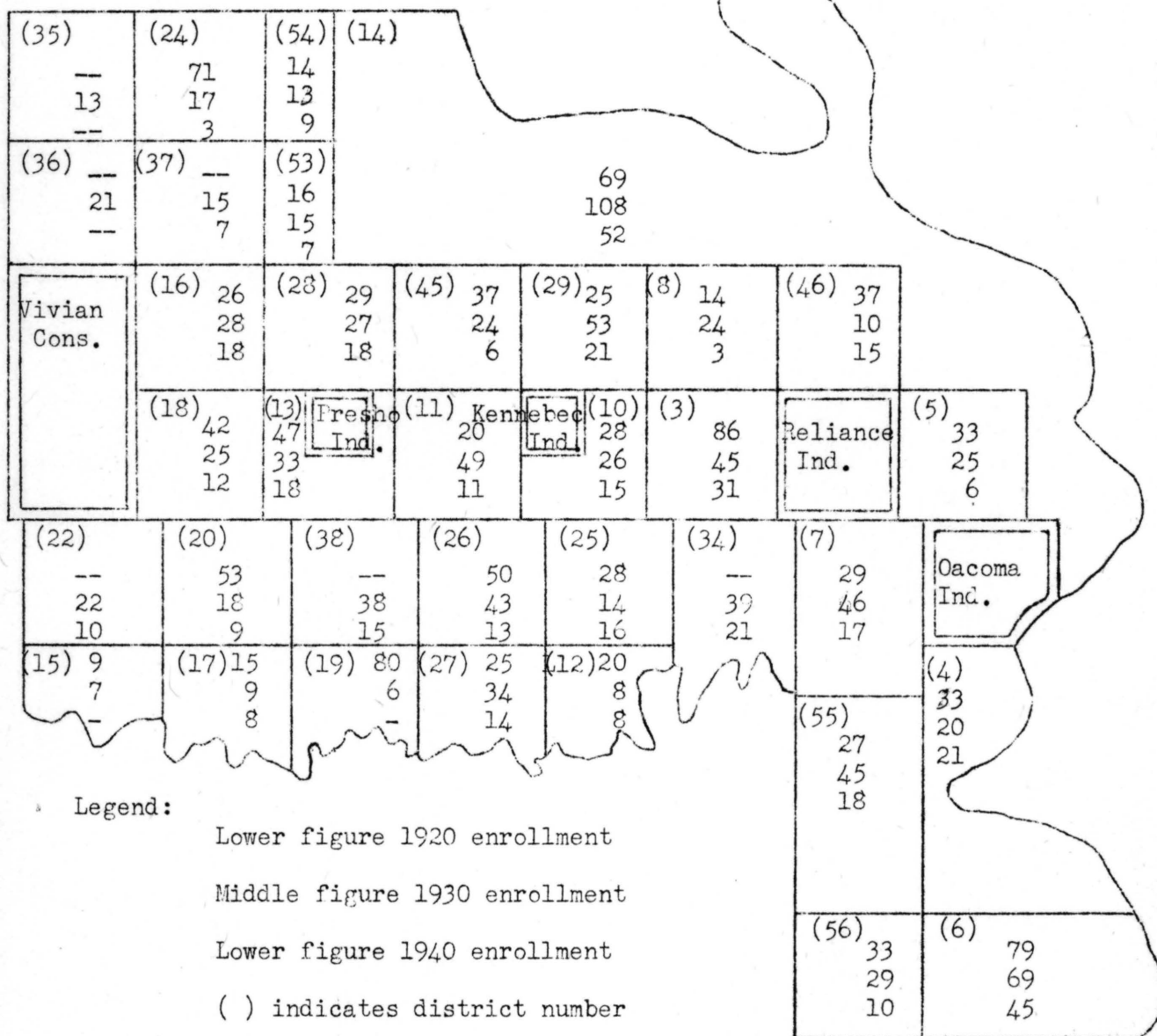
Legend: Gained Lost 0.0 - 9.9% Lost 10.0 - 19.9% Lost 20.0 - 29.9% Lost 30.0 - 39.9% Lost 40.0% or more

Source: Sixteenth U. S. Census, 1940

The most important factor in the elementary enrollment decline is shown in Figure 2, which records the loss of population through outward migration. Between 1930 and 1940 the population loss for Lyman county was 20.4 percent, almost three times as much as the state average of 7.5 percent. Since the combined populations of the incorporated towns of the county has increased slightly during the same period it is evident that this loss is closely related to rural enrollment declines. As previously mentioned a much greater decline has occurred in rural enrollments than in independent enrollments.

Losses were general throughout the county with only one township (Pratt) showing a gain. This 16.3 percent gain, however, represents an actual gain of only seven inhabitants. Losses ranged from 9.3 percent in Reliance township to 71.9 percent in Howe township. The direct relation between population decrease and enrollment decline is indicated in the fact that, usually, the townships which had the greatest loss in population, (Figures 2 and 3) had the greatest percent of decline in elementary enrollment and the greatest number of closed schools.

Figure 3. Elementary School Enrollment in Lyman County Districts, 1920, 1930 and 1940



Legend:

Lower figure 1920 enrollment

Middle figure 1930 enrollment

Lower figure 1940 enrollment

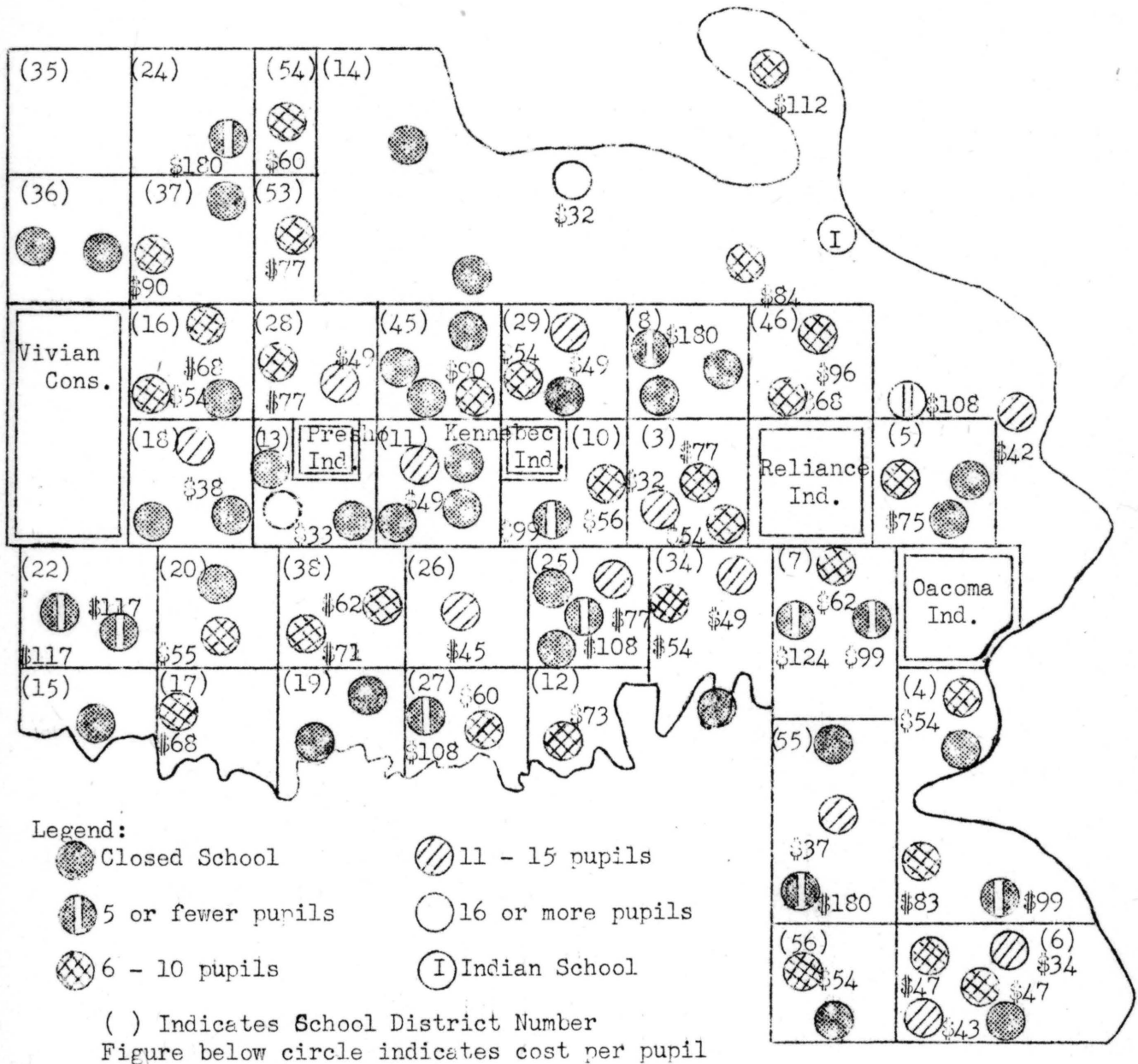
() indicates district number

Source: Records of Lyman County Superintendent of Schools

In Lyman county 55 common schools were in operation in 1940, in addition to the three independent districts of Presho, Kennebec, and Oacoma, and the two consolidated districts of Reliance and Vivian.

A definite downward trend is evident in Figure 3, which lists the elementary school enrollments of each district for 1920, 1930, and 1940. Of the 35 common school districts of Lyman county, 33 dropped in enrollment from 1930 to 1940. Thirty seven schools had been closed by 1940, indicating that a serious effort has been made to adjust to the declining enrollment situation. However, more than three-fourths of the schools still in operation had ten or fewer pupils enrolled, while only two schools had enrollments of more than 16 pupils. From 1920 to 1940 the rural enrollment had dropped 48 percent. Further enrollment losses may be expected in the future unless unforeseen population changes occur.

Figure 4. Instructional Cost Per Pupil by Size of School in Lyman County, 1940



Source: Records of Lyman County Superintendent of Schools

As Figure 4 indicates, the cost per pupil in the schools of Lyman county vary widely. Schools with the smallest enrollment show the greatest per pupil cost. In 1940 two schools, Iron Nation school in District 14 which enrolled 21 pupils and Lyman School in District 3 which enrolled 14 pupils, were operated at a per pupil cost of only \$32. During the same year in three other schools, Gilman School of District 8, Cedar Valley School of District 24 and Roseland School of District 55, with enrollments of only three pupils each, the per pupil cost amounted to \$108.

Table 1 (below) indicates that the operation of schools for less than ten pupils is excessively expensive on a cost per pupil basis. Schools with five or fewer pupils illustrate this clearly. The average cost per pupil for the schools in this group was \$120.56 as compared with \$32.30, the average per pupil cost in schools which enrolled 16 or more pupils.

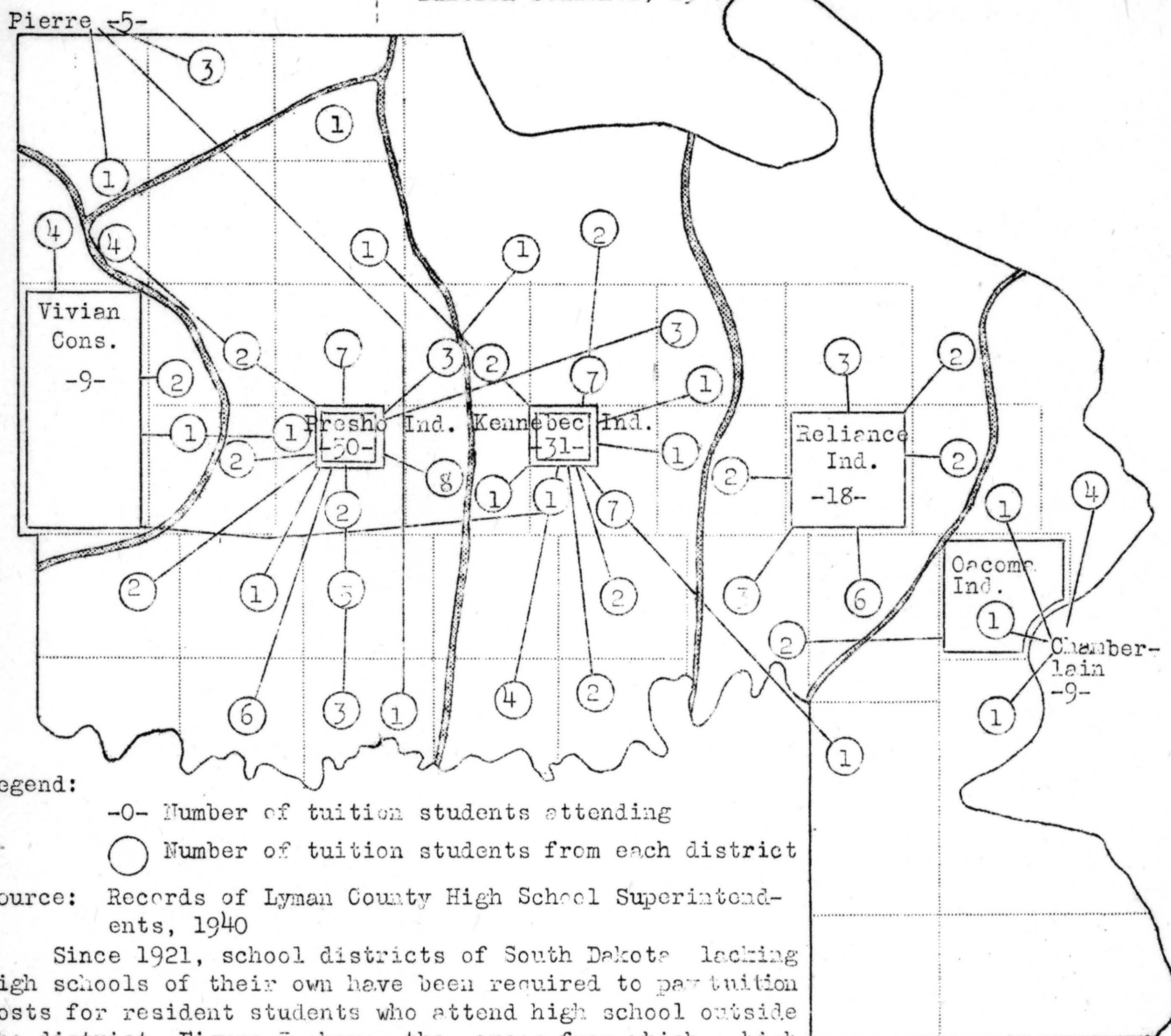
Table 1. Instructional Cost* Per Pupil for Operating Schools of Various Sizes in Lyman County, 1940

Size of School	Number of Schools	Number of Pupils	Total Cost	Average Cost Per Pupil
Total	92	477	\$29,587.50	\$120.56
Closed school	37	---	--	--
5 or fewer pupils	12	53	6,390.00	65.60
6 - 10 pupils	29	238	15,615.00	43.00
11 - 15 pupils	12	147	6,322.50	32.30
16 or more pupils	2	39	1,260.00	62.02

* Based on teachers' salaries only

Source; Records of the Lyman County Superintendent of Schools

Figure 6. Areas From Which High Schools Drew Their Lyman County Tuition Students, 1940



Legend:
 -0- Number of tuition students attending
 ○ Number of tuition students from each district

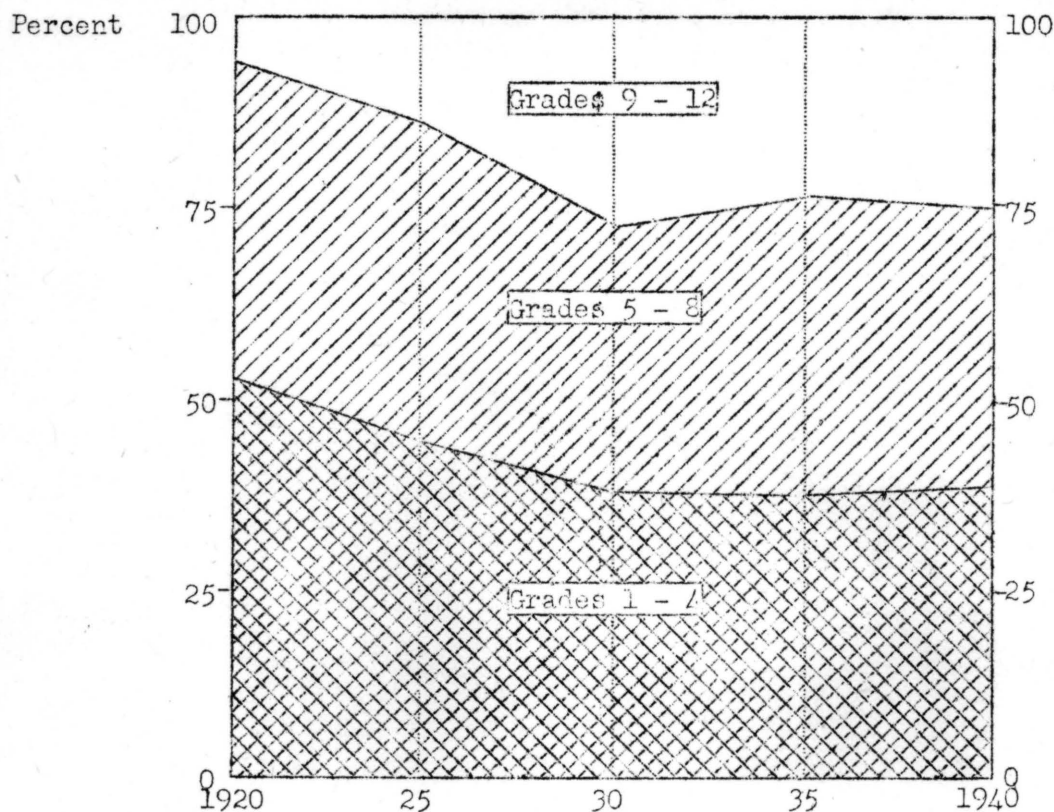
Source: Records of Lyman County High School Superintendents, 1940

Since 1921, school districts of South Dakota lacking high schools of their own have been required to pay tuition costs for resident students who attend high school outside the district. Figure 5 shows the areas from which high schools drew their Lyman county tuition students, numbering 123 in 1940. Fourteen of these attended high schools outside the county.

Realizing that the cost of operating their own secondary schools would be prohibitive, the people of the districts of Lyman county have adopted the policy of sending their students to high schools already existing in town and village centers. The adoption of a similar plan for elementary education seems practical to some extent, as elementary enrollments continue to shrink and cost per pupil to mount. Rural schools near independent districts could be closed and the remaining pupils sent to village schools, with the home district paying the tuition and transportation costs. Where distance and lack of good roads make this plan impractical the rural centralized school might be a solution. These plans have the advantage of economy, and of extending to farm children the superior educational facilities of the town school.

However, until the time that concentration of educational services in town centers becomes more general, districts may well continue their policy of closing those schools in which enrollments fall below a minimum and of sending their pupils to the nearest school still operating.

Figure 7. Percentage Distribution of Elementary and Secondary Enrollments, By Grade Groups in Lyman County, 1920 - 1940



Source: Biennial Reports of State Superintendent of Public Instruction

Between 1920 and 1940 the proportion enrolled in the first four elementary grades of Lyman county shrank from 52.5 to 36.4 percent of the total elementary and secondary enrollment (See Figure 7). The explanation of this trend may be found in the fact that birth rates have fallen sharply since 1920. Consequently with each successive year there have been fewer pupils to enter the first grade. Seventeen and five-tenths percent of those enrolled in school in 1920 were first graders, whereas in 1940 10.2 percent were first graders and 9.7 percent were eighth graders. (See Table 2) With the reduced number of persons under six years of age, it is obvious that elementary enrollment will continue to decline for a number of years even if the birth rate should be reversed.

Figure 7 also shows that the proportion enrolled in high school was four times as large in 1940 as in 1920, increasing from 6.2 to 24.8 percent. This trend may be explained by the fact that an increasingly greater proportion of eighth grade graduates are continuing their education in high school.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Elementary and Secondary Enrollment by Grades, 1920 - 1940

Year	Grade											
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1920	17.5	11.9	10.8	12.3	9.8	11.8	6.9	12.8	2.7	2.1	.8	.6
1925	12.8	10.7	9.9	10.7	10.8	10.0	12.0	9.4	4.1	4.7	3.2	1.7
1930	9.9	9.6	7.9	10.0	9.8	7.6	9.6	8.9	7.7	7.3	6.2	5.5
1935	11.3	7.1	9.8	9.0	9.4	8.7	10.4	10.0	8.1	7.1	5.2	3.9
1940	10.2	7.8	10.1	10.3	9.4	10.0	7.7	9.7	7.1	6.3	5.0	6.4

Source: Biennial Reports of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1920, 1925, 1930, 1935 and 1940

How Certain South Dakota Rural Communities Are Successfully
Solving the Declining Enrollment Problem

School boards confronted with the problem of declining enrollments should study their local situation carefully before taking action. The four plans listed below have all been tested by different South Dakota communities and have been found practical. One or the other of the first two alternatives has frequently been used as a temporary measure until further action was necessary. The last two plans are in the nature of a more or less permanent reorganization of the present rural district system.

Cooperating with nearby rural schools

When enrollment has dropped to five or fewer pupils certain districts have kept their district organization intact but have closed one or more schools. In cases where all schools of the district have been closed, the remaining pupils have been sent to the nearest adjoining rural school where satisfactory arrangements for tuition and transportation could be made.

Tuition pupils to town schools

Where satisfactory arrangements could not be made with nearby rural schools, the remaining pupils have been sent as tuition students to the nearest independent school in village or town. This plan is frequently no more expensive than the first, but has the further advantage of better educational experience than is usually possible in the one room school. In effect, it is essentially the same method which has been successfully used in sending farm children as tuition pupils to high school.

Consolidation

Where the second plan has been in operation for a number of years, town and nearby country districts have frequently consolidated into a single district. Such a plan has many advantages, but should first be tried out informally as a centralized school system before determining the details of consolidation.

County-wide district plan

The county-wide system exists in the four unorganized counties of South Dakota, Shannon, Todd, Washington and Washabaugh. Under this plan one county school board determines the location of rural schools and can regulate the number of such schools to fit in with the enrollment trend.